

2/28/2021

Support for HB-6355

Dear Chairs Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Ranking Members Kissel and Fishbein and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee,

Please accept my public comment in support of HB-6355, An Act Concerning Risk Protection Orders.

This act will help to avoid so many weapon related deaths, both suicides and homicides.

Just the other day, when I was on a hike with a friend, she told me how she worries about her teenage son, and that he is thinking and talking about not wanting to live in this situation. This situation relating to the pandemic, which made him miss seeing his friends due to social distancing rules, practice his sports because the facility had to close, and just feeling a general hopelessness. Luckily, he is not talking about harming himself, and in my friend's house, there are no weapons, but I can only guess how many other teens and adults feel that way and might actually have access to weapons. The pandemic has caused so much loss: economic, jobs, personal well-being and health, relationships, lives, and it has brought so much despair, depression and stress. In this situation, the risk for people with access to weapons to harm themselves or others has grown dramatically.

HB 6355 is meant as a last resource to reduce this risk, as it allows to *temporarily* remove weapons from people at risk of harming themselves or others - after due process, similar to domestic violence protective restraining orders. It would allow family or household members as well as medical professionals to petition the court for an Extreme Risk Protective Order, besides law enforcement. Allowing family members to petition the court directly, as 12 other states do, provides an alternative means of initiating the process for people who are reluctant to involve law enforcement at the outset, because they fear law enforcement or are concerned about stigmatizing the gun owner as a criminal. Note: although in Connecticut the criminal court presides over these hearings (while civil courts do so in most other states) a risk protection order does not create a criminal record.

And it would prevent persons at risk of harming themselves or others to buy a new weapon.

Obviously, social services to alleviate the situation, therapy and voluntary measures are always the better way, but in case they fail, HB 6355 is an important step for the safety of us all. ERPOs are proven effective to prevent suicides and homicides, and can even

prevent mass shootings. Most shooters show signs or voice their plans before they act, and a strong ERPO law can prevent them from following through.

Please favorably report HB-6355 out of committee so that the General Assembly can vote to strengthen our Extreme Risk Protection law, and help to prevent firearm suicide and homicide. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Respectfully,

Adelheid Koepfer